

Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (10/10)

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10. Shall we plan?

As a young student, Francis de Sales (he was 22 years old) realised that dangers to the soul and body threaten at every moment; with the help of his Confessor, Father Possevino, he sketched out a Life Programme or Spiritual Plan to know how he should behave each day and on every occasion. He wrote it down and read it frequently. It goes like this:

1. **Every morning make the Preview Examination:** which consists of thinking what work, what meetings, what conversations and special occasions may arise that day and planning how to behave at each of those times.

2. **At midday visit the Blessed Sacrament in some Church and make the Particular Examination** about my dominant defect, to see if I am fighting it and if I am trying to practise the virtue contrary to it.

There is an interesting detail here: for 19 years his Particular Examination would be about the “bad spirit”, that very strong defect that is his inclination to get angry. When someone, already a bishop and wonderfully kind and good, asked him what he has done to arrive at such a high degree of self-mastery, he would reply: ‘For 19 years, day by day, I have carefully examined myself about my intention not to treat anyone harshly’. This Particular Examination was a practice supremely followed by St Ignatius of Loyola, with real spiritual success. It is like an echo of that teaching of Thomas a Kempis: ‘If every year you seriously attack one of

your faults, you will arrive at holiness'.

3. No day without meditation.

For half an hour I dedicate myself to thinking about the favours God has granted me, the greatness and goodness of Our Lord, the truths the Holy Bible teaches, or the examples and teachings of the saints. And at the end of the meditation I choose a few thoughts to turn them over in my mind during the day and make a short resolution on how I will behave during the next 12 hours.

4. Every day pray the Holy Rosary

Do not neglect to pray it any day of my life.

This is a Promise that he made to the Blessed Virgin at a time of great distress and throughout his life he fulfilled it exactly. But later he would tell his disciples never to make this kind of promise all their lives, because they can bring anguish. Make resolutions yes, but promises no.

5. In my dealings with others be kind but moderate.

Being more concerned with getting others to talk about what they are interested in than me talking. What I say I already know. But what they say can help me grow spiritually. By talking I learn nothing, by listening distinctly I can learn a lot.

6. During the day think of God's presence.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. , (Cf. Psalm 138). "The Lord will pay to each one according to his works. Everyone will have to appear before the Court of God to give him an account of what he has done, of the good things and the bad things" (Cf. St Paul).

7. Every night before going to bed I shall do the Examination of the Day: I shall remember whether I began my day by commending myself to God.

If during my occupations I have remembered God many times to offer Him my actions, thoughts, words, and sufferings. Whether everything I have done today has been out of love for the good God. If I have treated people well. If I have not sought in my deeds and words to please my own self-love and pride, but to please God and do good to my neighbour. If I have been able to make some small sacrifice. If I have endeavoured to be fervent in speech. And I will ask the Lord's forgiveness for the offences I have caused him this day; I will make a resolution to become better from now on; and I will beg heaven to grant me strength to be ever faithful to God; and reciting my three Hail Marys, I will surrender myself peacefully to sleep.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (9/10)

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9. Let us come to the point

Dear young people,
if we look at our days, we make choices from morning to night, we are called upon to decide on simple things in our daily lives, but sometimes we are also faced with choices about things that affect our lives and are of vital importance. Fortunately, most of the choices we make concern the sphere of the simplest things, otherwise it would be very difficult and tiring to accomplish this important task. However, the important decisions are there and therefore deserve our

attention.

First of all, remember that we must never get caught up in the rush to make decisions quickly. If you have to choose between two things, especially when it comes to important realities of life (walking towards marriage with that person, taking concrete steps towards consecrated or priestly life), you must take the right time to discern what is right.

A second aspect to consider is to remember that you are free to choose what you want or what you think is right. For although God is all-powerful and can do everything, he does not want to take away the freedom he has given us. When God calls us to live where we can be fully happy according to His will, He wants this to be done with our full consent and that we choose not by force or compulsion, but in complete freedom.

Thirdly, I remind you that when choices conflict it is essential to let yourselves be guided: freedom must be accompanied, because it is difficult to find the way alone. Making fully free choices involves being clear about the good that others can receive from me, and how fully realised I can be when I am for others. I have already written to you on this subject, but let me remind you that it is here that we are most in need of an outside voice to confirm, or correct, or dissuade you from choices that mark your future.

One of the questions that obviously arises from this movement of choices, especially the most important ones, is: how can we be sure that we have made the right choice? The question is a legitimate one, because no one wants to make a mistake and we would all like to make the right choice once and for all. We would almost like to be able to choose once and never have to go back on it again and be comfortable in what we have already decided. In this sense, I think I must emphasise an important aspect. You have to understand well that choosing, making decisions, can never be something 'once and for all', but it is a process, a process that has sometimes even long timescales, that allow one to go deep into things and thus achieve more and more moral certainty that what I have done is the right choice. Whatever the state of life, it is not

required that, at the moment of choice, you are already perfect, aware of all that this choice requires. You are not called to a blind forever, but rather to a journey towards a forever that is conscious and strong of the decisions made daily, the result of a portion of goodwill guided by prudence and constancy.

In order to live the time of choice well, the first movement must be cultivated well, digging into one's life without relying only on emotions and without calculating only with intelligence. The balance of all the components of the person must always be sought and ensured, but especially at the beginning you must make sure that the choice you have made has a solid foundation. Once the initial choice has been made, there is no need to worry if bitterness or lukewarmness arises in the early stages. In fact, there is a risk of changing your mind often and quickly: once you have made your choice, do not look too much to the left or to the right. Sometimes it is easy, sometimes even seductive, to get distracted, explore or take other paths. Looking too much elsewhere can lead you down a different path, doubting and regretting the original choice you made. If this happens in times of euphoria and discouragement, in times of crisis, what is important to do is certainly not to make decisions at that moment and not to change the initial decision, but to stay in the moment, waiting for a quiet time that can allow you to calmly re-read what characterised the crisis and then make decisions about it, always according to conscience and in an accompanying movement. If one always tries to keep one's will firm in pursuing the chosen good, such as a serious engagement journey, or a stable community life experience for religious or priestly life, God will not fail to bring everything to a good end. As we have already said, this path requires many individual "yeses". every day. Even the most seemingly indifferent actions become fertile if they are oriented towards the Good to be pursued. It is a matter of perseverance that becomes daily fidelity.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (8/10)

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8. Prayer or service

Dear young people,
charity and prayer always go together. I must tell you that of the person of Jesus, one of his statements has always touched me very much: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29).

Well, the meek and humble-hearted Jesus has always strongly united his being the Son of the Father who loves him and with whom he is in perfect harmony, with the other dimension, that of charity and love of neighbour: "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me...he will be forgiven because he loved much...I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.."

You ask me how you can become holy in your daily life: through prayer and apostolate. While prayer nourishes friendship with God, through silence, the Sacraments and the Word of God, charity leads to loving one's brothers and sisters, to building community to the point of communion. The apostolate, the giving of oneself to one's brothers and sisters, first and foremost one's neighbours, is also the way in which you can begin to encounter God: if, in fact, you give yourself to your brothers and sisters with a meek and humble heart you will

encounter the Jesus who says *"you did it to me"*. Christian holiness (which I used to call "devotion") consists precisely in this: it is God's love that acts in us and we indulge it in our giving to others, briskly, readily and wholeheartedly.

Love of God and love of neighbour are not only the two main commandments, but they are mirrors of each other; you would say they are one to the other. To help you understand this, I remember once giving advice to a woman who was making a strong commitment to prayer: A soul who lives a freedom that comes from God, if interrupted in her prayer, will come out with a straight face and a gracious heart towards the troublemaker who has inconvenienced her, because everything is equal, either to serve God by meditating, or to serve him by bearing one's neighbour; one thing or the other is God's will, but at that moment it is necessary to bear and help one's neighbour.

You may be thinking that living this way in your world is very complicated. The culture and the historical/religious moment in which I lived were certainly full of conflict, but imbued with a religious sense and respect for the widespread Christian faith. Not so your time.

However, I can tell you that I too had to (and wanted to) live for a few years a decidedly challenging form of missionary work in a hostile land, ruled civilly and religiously by Calvinists.

Thinking back, I could tell you a few things about my experience and, perhaps, this could offer you some small suggestions on how to live in this complex time. In order to find out the motivations of our Huguenot "opponents", I asked the Pope for permission to read several texts, which at the time were forbidden to a Catholic, in which Catholicism was bitterly contested. My aim was to find common ground and then go to the roots of their theories, especially if they were ambiguous or incorrect.

Even when I was insulted, threatened, accused of magic, slandered, I responded gently with simple people, but firmly with those who were in bad faith. How much prayer, penance, fasting I offered to the Lord for those poor brothers of ours.

You carry the Gospel with your whole self and much more effectively with concrete help, willingness to listen, humility of approach that very often dissolves arrogance. To a lady and mother, whom I followed through correspondence for several years, I used to give some advice that may be useful to you:

“You must not only be devoted and love devotion, but you must make it lovable to everyone: you will make it lovable if you make it useful and pleasant. The sick will love your devotion if they find comfort in your charity; your family if they recognise that you are more attentive to their welfare, sweeter in matters, more amiable in your corrections... your husband if he sees that, the more your devotion grows, the more cordial you are to him and the sweeter in the affection you bear him; your relatives and friends if they see in you greater frankness, forbearance and compliance with their wishes that are not contrary to those of God. In short, you must make your devotion attractive.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (7/10)

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7. Who finds a friend...?

Dear young people,

the gift and responsibility of authentic, Christian friendship has characterised my entire existence. Probably so intensely that it has become one of the most concrete sources for discovering and rediscovering the beauty of God's love, especially in dark and delicate moments.

This very deep desire to love my loved ones in God's way and to dispassionately love my friends because of the love I received from the good Jesus, led me to express a kind of promise: 'In my heart, the desire to keep all my friendships will always remain very ardent'.

I think that friendship is not just complicity, light-hearted jokes, confidences that perhaps exclude others with malice, petty vendettas... but authentic education to accept the divine-human love that Jesus Christ had for us.

Within my family, the joy of friendship consisted in receiving and giving simple and genuine love. In Paris, I had genuine friends, study colleagues who helped me by passing me the notes of the theology courses that I could not attend and suggesting the best courses to take. At Padua, discernment in friendship for me meant distinguishing real friends from those who sought only a carefree approach on my part. The latter also played some heavy jokes on me, but I was always able to respond in kind, with decision and rectitude of spirit.

When I became a priest, I was offered the opportunity of a true friendship with Senator Favre. The difference in age and responsibility was very great: but the friendly relationship was always serene and respectful, and from the letters we exchanged, a fraternal affection of a quality that is difficult to achieve.

As a bishop, in 1604, I met Madame Francesca de Chantal, who later consecrated herself and founded the congregation of the Visitation Sisters with me. I would describe the friendship between us as "whiter than snow and purer than the sun", first as spiritual direction conducted from the heart and then as an exchange of gifts in the Spirit. The predominant theme of what had been a rich exchange of letters and conversations was the guidance towards the path of total trust in God: from

friendship between human persons enlightened by the Spirit to the heart of the relationship with Jesus Christ, to whom we can abandon ourselves with total trust, in light and in storm, in joy and in darkest days.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (6/10)

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6. All is well at home

Dear young people,

“I think that, in the world, there are no souls who love more cordially, more tenderly and, to put it mildly, more lovingly than I do, because it has pleased God to make my heart this way. It is said in my family that the first sentence that appeared on my lips as a child was: ‘My mother and God love me so much.’

From an early age I was among people. My father had decided that I would be educated not in our castle, but in a more regular school, comparing myself with other classmates and teachers, in short, moving away from the sort of ‘love bubble’ that had been created at the castle.

Back from my studies in Paris and Padua, I was well convinced of my choice to become a priest, but my father was not quite of that opinion: he had, unbeknownst to me, prepared a

complete library concerning Law, a position as Senator and a noble fiancée. It was not easy to bend him towards another path. I calmly presented my intentions to father: "Father, I will serve you until my last breath of life, I promise all service to my brothers. You speak to me of reflection, Father. I can tell you that I have had the idea of the priesthood since I was a child." Father, although he was "of a very steady spirit", wept. Mother intervened gently. There was silence. The new reality, under the silent word of God, had germinated. My father said: "My son, do in God and for God what He inspires you. For His sake, I give you my blessing." Then he could take no more: abruptly he closed himself in his study.

At the end of my father's life, I was given the grace to discern in summary all the love that made him so dear to me: in his candour, his ability to take on important commitments, his taking on the responsibility of guiding me to the end, the constant trust he showed in me, I always discerned the goodness of a noble man, also used to a rough life but with a big heart. Moreover, with the passing of time, his lively temperament softened, he even learnt to allow himself to be contradicted: my mother's good long-term influence was decisive.

Dad and Mum really showed me two different, but complementary, faces of God's own grace and goodness.

Perhaps you too, like me, have wondered how to live through the fatigue of experiencing that the vocation you are discovering is different from what others would expect of you. I have proposed, as much to the simplest men of my land as to the king and queen of France, a very simple but highly demanding way: on the one hand, "let nothing trouble you" and "ask for nothing, refuse nothing"; on the other hand, that existence, with the choices it brings, finds meaning in being faced, even with fatigue, exclusively to live "as it pleases God". Only from here is born the "perfect joy" which probably unites all true saints, men and women of God of yesterday and today.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (5/10)

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5. After all, can I do it alone?

Dear young people,

I have learnt first-hand how important it is to have spiritual guidance in one's life.

In 1586, when I was 19 years old, I experienced one of the greatest crises in my life and tried to resolve it on my own, but with little success. From this experience I realised that do-it-yourself is not possible in the spiritual life, because in the human heart strong tensions are constantly being played out between love of God and love of self, and that they are difficult to resolve without the help of a person to accompany you on the journey.

So, once I arrived in Padua to pursue my university studies, my first concern was to find a good spiritual guide with whom I could draw up a personal life programme and thus take my journey of growth seriously.

Here I experienced that perfectionism and voluntarism cannot be the elements that make one walk in a full life, but only the acceptance of one's own fragility handed over completely to God.

Even after becoming a priest, I continued my path of

accompaniment and spiritual direction; I discovered, however, the importance of sharing the journey of my interior life with my cousin Louis de Sales and, above all, with Antoine Favre, Senator of Savoy. Despite the diversity of our vocations, we shared a true spiritual friendship and walked together in the ways of the Lord.

It was also important in my life to have a confessor with whom I could open my conscience and ask God for forgiveness. This accompanied me to fight sin at its root and to become free.

Rely on a spiritual guide, a person familiar with God and whom you trust, with whom you can open your heart and read your story in the light of Faith, so that you can become aware of and emphasise the gifts you have received and the great possibilities open before you. For me, there is no true spiritual direction if there is no friendship, i.e. exchange, communication, mutual influence. This is the basic climate that enables spiritual direction.

I suggest a small path that has been helpful for me to walk with my spiritual guide and that has enabled me to find inner balance:

- start from your real life and the concrete situation in which you live with its resources and limitations, trying to make unity in the many experiences you have. Your life, in fact, runs the risk of being filled with so many things to do without meaning and direction. One suggestion I give you is not to be distracted and always be present in the present moment.

- During your days you are drawn to and oscillate between different forces, sometimes not harmonious with each other: that of the senses, emotions, rationality and faith. What allows you to find the balance between them is dedication, that is, always putting your heart into the things you do, with the awareness that every moment is an opportunity and a call to fulfil God's will in your life.

You may ask, what is the point of making the effort to be accompanied? The authenticity of your life is at stake: to you who are caught up in anxieties, fears and worries, the path of

accompaniment will help you discover who you really are, but above all for Whom you are.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (4/10)

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4. Where is your heart

Dear young people,
you have written to me asking about discernment which, I remind you, means being attentive to the voice of God that is deep in your heart. As Jesus tells us, “where your heart is, there is your treasure.” In other words, who am I and for whom am I prepared to give my heart? The journey to the depths of the heart is not always easy, for along with the whispers of God there are also loud cries and other voices competing with Him and trying to get your attention. These voices can manifest themselves in our thoughts, feelings and desires. Does that mean we have to ignore them in order to hear God’s voice? I would say the opposite: we must learn to discern these voices. We must sift our thoughts, feelings and desires to understand what belongs to what we know to be temptations and, instead, to understand the inspirations that come from and lead to God. It is precisely through these inspirations that God communicates desires to our hearts.

As you know from my writings, I am a great admirer of St Paul. We should follow his suggestions and teachings: "Do not conform to the mentality of this century, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may discern the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect to him." If we decide to simply follow our thoughts, emotions, and superficial desires, we will never truly perceive the voice of God speaking in the depths of our hearts. So it is really necessary that we question ourselves:

- firstly: do these feelings, thoughts and desires come from God or from something else?

- secondly: are they helping me to reach God or are they leading me away from him?

Once you have laid this foundation, you can proceed to discern and seek the voice of God that is already present in your spirit.

Unfortunately, we spend a lot of time and energy revolving around ever-changing emotions and a "multiplicity of desires" that prevent us from making the choices that would lead us deeper. This process simply produces inconstancy, impatience and a constant desire for change.

In my *Spiritual conversations*, I recalled St Paul's words that everyone is a temple of God (1 Cor 3:16): as in the temple in Jerusalem, we need to pass through a series of courtyards in our hearts to reach the innermost and deepest place called the Holy of Holies.

Taking the idea from an invention of your time, I would like to use the image of the lift. You enter the lift with your thoughts, feelings, desires; if these become inspirations, they can take you deep into the Holy of Holies. The lift will take you lower and lower as you learn the truth contained in these feelings, thoughts and desires.

Finally you will reach the core, although I prefer the biblical term "heart". There words are no longer necessary. In the heart, in fact, the Spirit can reach the soul of each of you and become fully your Master. Here the mind is called to

silence and there is no longer any need for reasoning or words that would lead to distraction. Here we understand what spirit discernment is because God is Spirit and He speaks directly to your soul illuminating your path and showing you the way forward. If you live in the Spirit, walk according to the Spirit (Gal 5:26).

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (3/10)

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3. If I do not know myself, can I be free to choose?

Dear young people,

it is a great joy for me to welcome and share your vocational concerns. You are living a very beautiful period of life, you deeply feel the desire to live to the full, and all the paths to reach it are open before you. Have the courage to search patiently and, above all, to arrive at a decision that will fill your yearnings with truest happiness. It is not an easy task: it implies assuming one's own fragility and discovering the fundamental truth that life is a wonderful gift that has been given to us, a mysterious gift that surpasses us.

God has given us life and faith. The Christian vocation is precisely the response to the call to life and love with which God has created us. We are called to be children of God and to

live as children, feeling and acting in the love that God has poured into our hearts. We are called to be his disciples and to be them with passion. By responding to it, we find the path to true happiness.

What we seek, what we want to be, has as its basis and foundation who we are. Starting from the loving acceptance of what we are, the Lord calls us to build our identity. We can hardly live this search and this effort alone. We have the great good fortune that Jesus himself wants to accompany us. Always keep Jesus close to you, as your companion and friend. Nobody like him can help you find your way to God and be happy. Next to him, invoking him with simplicity and with much confidence, you will be able to discover better the meaning of existence and of your vocation.

Seeking your vocation means being concerned about how to respond to God's dream for you. By him you were created and dreamed. What is God's dream for your life? And how can you respond to this dream? Let it always be God's will, the divine will, that which guides your life. Seek, love and strive to do God's will. He has given you life to give it, for you to give it, to share it, to hand it over, not for you to keep it for yourself. To whom do you want to give your life? It has a divine destiny. Out of love you were created in the image and likeness of God and only He will fill your desire for goodness, happiness and love.

The first and most important task you have in your hands is to discover and build your vocation. It is not something established from the beginning, in advance. It is the fruit of freedom, of a freedom built slowly, capable of venturing on the path of self-giving. Only with great inner freedom can you arrive at an authentic vocational decision. Freedom and love, in fact, are the two great wings to face the path of life, to give and deliver it.

I conclude by assuring you that I will always remember and commend you to the Lord, so that He may accompany you, guide you and direct your life along the path of grace and love. On your part, always seek the good Jesus, have Him as the friend

of your soul, invoke Him, share with Him your sorrows, your anxieties, your worries, your joys and your sadnesses. And dare to commit yourself seriously to Him and to His cause. He is waiting for you.

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Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (2/10)

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2. What to do tomorrow

Dear young people,
you are certainly asking yourselves: what will we do later, what can we expect from life? What are we called to? These are questions that everyone asks themselves, consciously or even unconsciously. Perhaps you know the word 'vocation'. What a strange word: vocation! If you prefer, we can talk about happiness, the meaning of life, the will to live...

Vocation means call. Who is calling? That is a good question. Perhaps someone who loves me. Each of us has his or her own vocation. Mine was a bit special. In my native Savoy, when I was a small boy, at the age of eleven, I felt called to give myself to God in the service of his people, but my parents, particularly my father, had other plans for me, as I was the eldest in the family. As the years passed and during the studies my father had me do in Paris, my desire grew more and

more: grammar, literature, philosophy, but also horse riding, fencing, dancing...

At 17, I had a crisis. I was doing well in my studies, but my heart was not satisfied. I was looking for something... During the carnival in Paris a friend saw me sad: "What's wrong, are you sick? Let's go and see the carnival", "But I don't want to see the carnival", I answered him, "I want to see God!" That year a famous Bible teacher was explaining the Song of Songs. I went to hear him. It was like a thunderbolt for me. The Bible was a love story. I had found the One I was looking for! And with the help of my spiritual companion, I made a little rule to receive Jesus in the Eucharist as often as possible.

At the age of 20 a new serious crisis hit me. I was convinced that I would go to hell, that I would be eternally damned. What pained me most, besides of course the deprivation of the vision of Jesus, was to be deprived of the vision of Mary. This thought tortured me: I almost did not eat any more, I did not sleep any more, I had become all yellow! My prayer was this: "Lord, I know, I will go to hell, but give me at least this grace that when I am in hell, I may continue to love you!" After six weeks of anguish I went to church before Our Lady's altar and prayed to her with a prayer that begins: "Remember, O Virgin Mary, that it has never been heard that anyone, having recourse to your patronage, imploring your help and protection, has been abandoned by you." After that my illness fell to the ground "like the scales of leprosy". I was cured!

After Paris, my father sent me to Padua to study law. Meanwhile I continued to suffer from my vocational dilemma: I felt that the call came from God, and at the same time I owed obedience to my father, according to the custom very much felt in my time. I was perplexed. I sought advice from my companions, especially Father Antonio Possevino. With his help and discernment, I chose some rules and exercises for the spiritual life and also for life in society with companions and all kinds of people. At the end of my studies I made a pilgrimage to Loreto. I remained as if in ecstasy – my

companions say – for half an hour in the Holy House of Mary of Nazareth. I again entrusted my vocation and my future to the Mother of Jesus. I have never regretted having trusted Her totally.

Back home at the age of 24, I met a beautiful girl called Francesca. I liked her, but I liked my life project better. What to do? I will not tell you all the details of my battle here. Just know that in the end I dared to ask my father to give me permission to follow my dream. He finally accepted my choice, but he cried.

From that moment on, my life changed completely. Before, my family and my classmates saw me all focused on myself, worried, a bit closed off. Then from one moment to the next, everything was set in motion. I had become another man. I was ordained a priest at the age of 26 and immediately threw myself into my mission. I had no more doubts: God wanted me on this path. I was happy.

My vocation, you may think, was a special vocation, although I will tell you that I was also made bishop of Geneva-Annecy at the age of 35. In my pastoral and accompaniment ministry, I was always convinced and taught that every one has a vocation. Indeed, it should not be said: everyone has a vocation, but it should be said: everyone is a vocation, that is, a person who has received a “providential” task in this world, in anticipation of the future world promised to us.

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WYD as a synodal experience of Church renewal

Interrupting the life of a city is always an extraordinary act. Filling the streets with young people from all corners of the world is a moving memory. A World Youth Day is this and much more.

The organisation of a WYD requires so many hours of work, putting all kinds of resources at the disposal of young people. If it bears spiritual fruit in proportion to the effort, it will have been worth it, all for an educational, communicative and evangelising reason: the objective of an event like this is to make Jesus Christ known to a large number of young people, and to succeed in making them understand that following Him is a sure way to find happiness.

It is to young people that we must look with particular fondness these days and discover the secret of a surprising phenomenon: a “silent revolution” is taking place in the world of youth, whose biggest stage is the World Youth Days. Young people who raise questions among Christians and are not afraid to show themselves as such, young people who do not want to be intimidated let alone deceived, young people who bring enthusiasm and passion to bring about change.

These meetings continue to surprise both inside and outside the Church. And they are a snapshot of a youth that is very different from the one proposed by some, thirsting for values, searching for the deeper meaning of life, with a desire for a different world than the one we found when we arrived.

Today, a significant percentage of WYD participants come from very different family, social and cultural backgrounds. Many of these young pilgrims have no Christian reference points in their own contexts. In this sense, the lives of many of them

resemble surfing: they cannot expect to change the wave, but they adapt to it to direct the board where they want it to go. These radiant faces of the Church wake up every day with the desire to be better followers of Jesus among their family, friends and acquaintances.

Young people have the strength to give their best, but they need to know that this commitment is doable, they need the complicity of adults, they need to believe that this struggle is neither sterile nor doomed to failure. For this reason, the days are a way for young people to experience synodality, the particular style that characterises the life and mission of the Church. Belonging to their local church community implies belonging to a much larger and universal community. A community in which we need everyone, young and old, to 'take charge of the world'.

For this, it is necessary to cultivate certain attitudes for this new synodal spirituality. WYD allows us to:

- share the small stories of others, experiencing the courage to speak freely and bring to the table deep conversations that come from within;
- learn to grow together with others and appreciate how we are adding to each other, even if at different “speeds” (styles, ages, visions, cultures, gifts, charisms and ministries in the Church);
- to take care of the “community green spaces” for our relationship with God, to take care of our connection with the source of life, with the One who takes care of us, to root our trust and our hopes in Him, to unload our worries on Him, to be able to “take charge” of the mission He leaves in our hands;
- to accept and welcome our fragility, which connects us to the fragility of our world and mother Earth;
- to be a voice that joins with many others to denounce the excesses that are currently being committed against the Planet and to take common actions that contribute to the emergence of

a more responsible and ecological citizenship;

– to reorient pastoral processes together from a more open and inclusive perspective, making us ready to “go out to meet” all young people where they are, and to make visible and real the desire to be a “Church on the move” that reaches out to believers and non-believers alike, and to become a travelling companion for those who want or need it.

In short, a synodal Church that fosters a change of heart and mind that enables us to approach our mission in JESUS WAY. An invitation to feel within us the touch and gaze of Jesus that always makes us new.

Official WYD 2023 website: <https://www.lisboa2023.org>

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